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FM AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0980
INFO RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE 8118
RUEHKS O/AMCONSUL SAPPORO PRIORITY 0211
RUEHNAG/AMCONSUL NAGOYA PRIORITY 2324
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA PRIORITY 0200
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA PRIORITY 0223

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SUBJECT: OTSU MAYORAL ELECTION: LDP & KOMEITO DEFEAT
LABOR CANDIDATE

¶1. (SBU) LDP Incumbent Makoto Mekata won the Otsu mayoral election after a close race with Kimiko Kise, in the largest victory for the ruling coalition in Shiga Prefecture in several years, and a disappointment for the independent governor, Yukiko Kada. Mekata beat Kise by only 3,600 votes, a margin of about three percent. Ruling coalition junior partner Komeito proved that it could still tap into its lay religious organization to provide votes. Neither a politically active labor movement, nor a focus on environmental issues, was enough for the opposition to win this election.

¶2. (U) There were three main candidates in the Otsu mayoral election of January 20th: the JCP's Toshikazu Inoue (55); Mekata (66), supported by LDP and Komeito; and Kise (55), a businessperson fielded by the Rengo trade union. Kise was heavily supported by Governor Yukiko Kada's support organization, "Taiwa-no-Kai" (Group for Dialogue), and endorsed by the opposition Democratic Party (DPJ) and Social Democratic Party.

¶3. (SBU) Kise failed to translate her environmental protection platform into a winning electoral strategy. Kise called for an end to construction of the Ohtogawa Dam currently planned for Otsu. The issue was not as important to Otsu voters as the construction of a shinkansen (bullet train) station in Ritto City had been during the gubernatorial election in 2006.

¶4. (SBU) Kise's campaign manager, Kaoru Matsuda, told poleconoff that his candidate was handicapped by a short campaign period bisected by the New Year holidays, when most of the country shuts down. She entered the race late while she considered Rengo's invitation to run. The incumbent had the advantage of having strong name recognition. Voter turnout on Election Day started strong among young, unaffiliated voters, an important support group, but plummeted as a snap cold spell dropped temperatures below freezing in the evening.

¶5. (SBU) Coming on several high profile losses in Shiga and around the region, the ruling coalition considered Otsu a must-win race. By maintaining a disciplined focus on national issues and his own achievements, Mekata kept Kise's strong environmental message from dominating the election. The coalition organized its supporters effectively: 90 percent of Komeito supporters, and an even higher proportion of neighborhood associations, went to Mekata. Matsuda

noted with regret that "without Komeito, the LDP would have surely lost the race." The union members and environmental activists were energized and did their best, but Matsuda credited the LDP/Komeito election machine for having done even better this time around.

RUSSEL